

## **15 BIBLE REASONS A CHRISTIAN SHOULD JOIN A BIBLE-BELIEVING CHURCH**

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The following is by the late Dr. Bruce Lackey:

New Testament Christians joined a local church. The churches had membership lists, either in writing or in memory. Since the Scripture was given for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16), God evidently wants us to follow their example. Although there is no specific verse that says, "Thou shalt join a church," there are fifteen places that either require or teach by example that we should do so.

(1) THE FIRST CHURCH HAD A MEMBERSHIP. "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)" (Ac 1:15). This Jerusalem church had a list of about 120 names that made up its membership. Even though the Bible says "about an hundred and twenty," it does not mean that there was any uncertainty. "About" is used commonly in scripture to designate a number, in keeping with the usual practice of that day, when people were not trying to be as specific as we are in the twentieth century. For example, John 1:39 says, ". . . it was about the tenth hour." It was not important in those days to know whether it was 9:55 or 10:05, since they did not have watches, clocks, etc. Likewise, John 6:19 says, ". . . rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs." Similarly, Acts 5:7 describes Sapphira coming to the church "about the space of three hours after." We must remember that the Holy Spirit inspired words that people would normally understand and speak, but this does not mean that He was uncertain! The events of John 1:39 and Acts 5:7 did happen at a specific moment, although that moment is not recorded. And the very mention of "the number of names" in Acts 1:15 shows that a collection actually existed, even though we are not told the exact number. The important thing to note is not that there were 119, 120, or 121, but that there actually was a "number of the names together," in short, a membership of definite individuals who made up that church.

(2) ALL THOSE MEMBERS ASSEMBLED TOGETHER ON PENTECOST. Acts 2:1 says, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." The word all certainly indicates that a specific number was there. He did not say "a majority," or "several," but all.

(3) SPECIFIC PEOPLE WERE ADDED TO THIS MEMBERSHIP ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST. According to Acts 2:41, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Again, the word about has the same significance. The important word is added, showing that the number grew. Whether they were written down on paper is not the issue; the fact is that certain specific people were saved, baptized, and added to certain specific people! (This is interpreted by some to mean that

they were added to the Lord, or to the whole body of Christ, but the context has been speaking of that group of 120, ever since Acts 1:15, and continues to speak of that earthly group which met together in Jerusalem, through v.47).

(4) THE LORD ADDED PEOPLE TO THE LOCAL CHURCH. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). This church was not the whole body of Christ (or the comprehensive church, or the universal church, or whatever the term one might prefer), but the local church, because of the context. The word church must be interpreted by context. For example, no one would say that "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38) was the same as the church in the New Testament, since the context clearly shows that it was the nation of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Likewise, Heb. 12:22-23 would obviously not be a local church, but "the heavenly Jerusalem," etc. Context must determine meaning, and the context of Acts 2:47 is that of the church at Jerusalem. . . . Therefore, the church mentioned in Acts 2:47 is that church at Jerusalem that had just evangelized and baptized and was meeting in the temple and from house to house, teaching doctrine and breaking bread (vv. 41-46). And, in saying "the Lord added . . ." we conclude that He led these people to join that Jerusalem church, and gave the apostolic leaders of that church the terms on which the new believers were to be added.

(5) THERE WAS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND OUTSIDERS. Acts 5:11 contrasts "the church" with others who "heard these things." It is referring to the surprising deaths of Ananias and Sapphira when it says "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." Therefore, it must have been common knowledge that some specific persons belonged to the church, while others did not. And we must remember that the Holy Spirit inspired these words, so it was actually He that made this difference.

(6) SOME PEOPLE DID NOT DARE TO JOIN THE CHURCH! Immediately after the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, and subsequent miracles by the apostles, Acts 5:13 tells us that "of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them." It was common knowledge who belonged to this new church, and after such a harsh judgment on two members who did not conform, some people did not dare to join them! Some belonged; others dared not join, for one reason or another. When one joins, there is a membership!

(7) SPECIFIC MEMBERS ELECTED OFFICERS. The apostles commanded the congregation, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" (Acts 6:3). They were speaking to a specific group whom they knew as "brethren"; they said that these men were to be chosen from "among you," obviously designating a specific group of people. Any way we look at this, there must have been a membership.

(8) THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES INCREASED. Acts 9:31 clearly implies membership by saying, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy

Ghost, were multiplied." There had to be a number of people to start with, and a bigger number when they were multiplied. To say that 50 people became 250 is to designate a membership.

(9) THE CHURCHES WHICH PAUL ESTABLISHED "INCREASED IN NUMBER DAILY" (Acts 16:5). Such a statement would have been impossible unless they had had a specific number to begin with. If 23 were increased to 25 on Sunday, 28 on Monday, etc., there was obviously a membership to start with. And it is significant that all believers in those areas were considered to be in the churches. The same situation prevailed everywhere Paul went; when people were converted, they were organized into churches. See Acts 14:21-23 and 15:36, compared with 16:4-5.

(10) ELDERS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR CERTAIN PEOPLE. The Ephesian elders were told to feed the church of God, the flock, over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers (Acts 20:28). Obviously, the church, the flock, was a specific group of people. How else could these elders carry out their responsibilities? It had to be clearly known who made up the church, the flock. Such would be a membership.

(11) TROUBLE-MAKERS CAME FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH. Paul warned, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Their dangers would come, not only from "grievous wolves" outside, but from men "of their own selves." Some were outside the church; some were in. Again, this is obviously a membership.

(12) THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH WAS COMMANDED TO EXCLUDE SOME BRETHREN. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11). This eating could not refer to ordinary meals, since the Lord Jesus ate with publicans and sinners (Mat. 9:10). It must refer to eating at the Lord's table. He likewise says, ". . . put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13). This could not mean to stop associating with, or speaking to, such a person, because a parallel passage in 2 Thes. 3:14-15 says, ". . . note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." It would be impossible to admonish him if they never associated with or spoke to him. To "have no company" must mean church company or fellowship, preventing him from the privileges of membership (holding office, voting, partaking of the Lord's supper).

(13) THERE IS NO WAY TO EXERCISE CHURCH DISCIPLINE UNLESS THERE IS A MEMBERSHIP. Mat. 18:7 instructs the church to consider an unrepentant brother as a "heathen man and a publican." How would this be done? Certainly not by denying him access to the meetings! We would most assuredly want heathen people to attend our services and hear the preaching of God's Word. 1 Cor. 14:23-25 shows the importance of this. Neither could it mean to stop speaking to the person. Christians should definitely speak to heathen people; how else could

we win them to Christ? But, a church could not permit a heathen to be elected as one of its officers, or preach, or teach, or vote on church matters, or partake of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, to say that only certain people are eligible to hold office, etc., is to designate a membership.

(14) 1 COR. 6:1-11 DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN "THE UNJUST . . . THE SAINTS." Paul spoke of "a wise man among you (who) shall be able to judge between his brethren" (v.5). He rebuked them for going to law before the "unbelievers" (v.6). These brethren were called a church in 1 Cor. 1:2. Some people were known to belong to the church, some were not.

(15) 1 PET. 4:17 DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN "THE HOUSE OF GOD" AND "THEM THAT OBEY NOT THE GOSPEL." When we remember that the "house of God" is the local church, according to 1 Tim. 3:15, it becomes obvious that those who had obeyed the gospel were in a church. Whether or not their names were written on some list is unknown and unimportant; what is obvious is that they knew who was in the church.

The point is that we have no instance of New Testament believers refusing to belong to a local church. Joining the church was the normal thing to do, after conversion. The person who has settled the matter of salvation should then be baptized, following Christ's example and command, and join a Bible-believing and Bible-practicing church.

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